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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 003207

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2017
TAGS: PREL MARR ECON RS
SUBJECT: MOSCOW LOWERS CHAVEZ VISIT PROFILE

REF: MOSCOW 3139

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1,4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Amid media reports that the Kremlin is
attempting to keep a leash on the firebrand Venezuelan leader
in the lead up to the Kennebunkport summit, Hugo Chavez held
a low-key meeting with President Putin on June 28. The
tete-a-tete meeting presumably covered two important agenda
items: arms sales and energy, but no contracts or
deliverables were announced. While Chavez used the opening
of the Simon Bolivar Latin cultural Center in Moscow to
accuse the U.S. of "imposing tyranny", he did not have an
opportunity to address the Russian Parliament, but was
limited to a closed session with a smaller group of lawmakers
and a one-on-one meeting with Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov.
Chavez is scheduled to stop over at the Belorusian capital
Minsk before flying to Rostov-on-Don later today. End
summary.

Kremlin Lowers Profile

¶2. (SBU) In contrast to the abundant pre-visit press
coverage of the Venezuelan President, both electronic and
print media have been low-key on the actual visit, with
little reported on the late night Putin-Chavez meeting on
June 28. Several daily newspapers, including Kommersant and
Nezavisimaya Gazeta, commented that the Kremlin is taking
steps to minimize U.S. irritation over the Venezuelan
leader's visit.

¶3. (C) In contrast to the pre-visit hype on energy and arms
contracts, the GOR has played down the prospect of
deliverables. Anatoliy Sokolov, Senior Counselor at the MFA
Venezuela Desk, told us June 29 that the two presidents'
"long" meeting at the Putin's retreat in Novo Ogaryovo last
night went "very well," and the two leaders covered all
bilateral issues. While he confirmed that energy was on the
agenda, Sokolov said the result of the tete-a-tete meeting
would be known only next week. Ivan Safranchuk, Chief
Defense Analyst at the World Security Institute, recalling a
similarly controversial visit from Syria a few years ago,
noted that announcements of arms contracts signing could come
well after the visit. Vladimir Milov, Institute for Energy
Policy, and a well-connected industry insider, confirmed that
Putin and Chavez discussed "routine" energy issues, including
exploration, gasification, and the Venezuela-Brazil-Argentina
pipeline, but stressed that no breakthroughs or surprises
related to energy policy or security occurred.

Duma Downplayed

¶4. (U) Whether Chavez would be allowed to address the State

Duma's plenary session sparked a public dispute among Duma
deputies. Rather than granting Chavez the privilege of
addressing the plenary, the Duma Council limited Chavez's
interaction to a one-on-one with Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov,
followed by a meeting with Duma deputies in a smaller hall
which reportedly holds about 40 people. An effort by the
Communists to overturn the measure was soundly defeated (123
to 210) at the ruling party's urging. In the end, both
meetings were closed to the press.

Chavez Unplugged

¶5. (U) In his one unscripted event prior to meeting Putin,
Chavez used the opening of the Simon Bolivar Center to
denounce the U.S.'s "imperial hegemony" and to call for a
strong Russia to "recreate" a multipolar world. Aiming at
portraying Venezuela as a bastion of defiance of the U.S.,
Chavez emphasized Venezuela's solidarity with the Kremlin
leadership. During his speech there, Chavez denied that he
came to Moscow for weaponry contracts.

Comment

¶6. (C) While certain groups -- in the Duma, media and public
-- have played up Chavez's anti-U.S., pro-Russia rhetoric,
the GOR clearly is mindful of the upcoming U.S.-Russia summit
and attempting to keep the Venezuelan leader in check.
RUSSELL